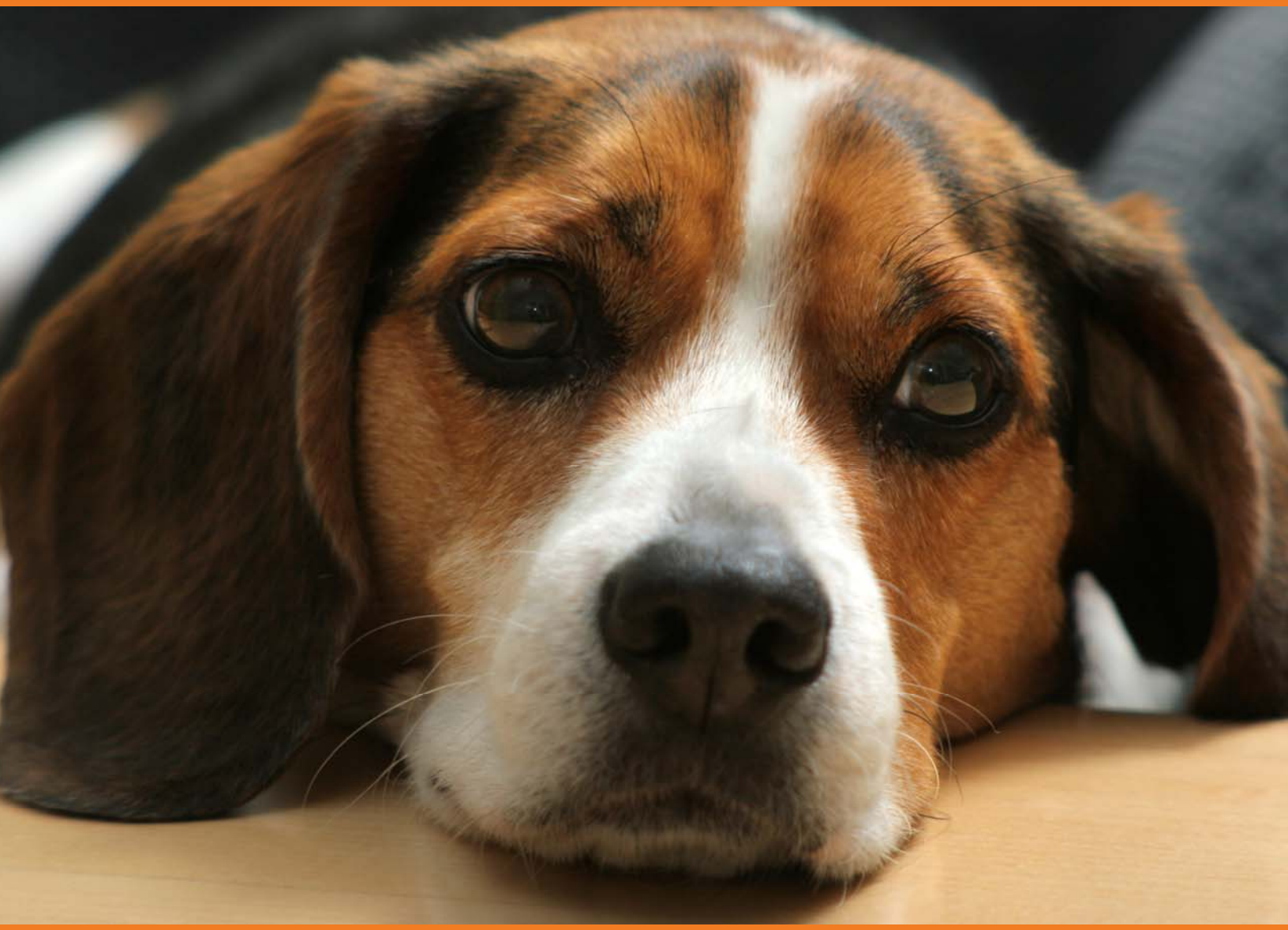


Operation Bark Alert

BARKALERT.mo.gov

Operation Bark Alert

In 1992, Missouri led the nation by becoming one of only a handful of states with a dog regulatory program. In a continued effort to stay at the forefront of animal welfare, Missouri once again took the lead in cracking down on unlicensed breeders with the launch of Operation Bark Alert by Missouri Governor Jay Nixon and Director of Agriculture Dr. Jon Hagler.

New Policies, New Standards

With new leadership and a renewed focus, the Department of Agriculture has begun the process of reviewing all internal policies in the Animal Care Facilities program. Policies are being standardized and procedures updated, and an upgraded tracking system has been put in place.

Training for animal care inspectors has been increased to ensure consistent enforcement practices across districts in Missouri.

Public Involvement BARKALERT.mo.gov

Operation Bark Alert launched with a new online reporting system. With every tip from the public, animal care inspectors visit the location in question to validate the report of animal welfare. With the help of the public, Operation Bark Alert acted on more than 100 online tips in its first year, resulting in 40 separate rescues and surrenders.

Prosecution Bark Alert

Prosecution Bark Alert was launched in mid-2009 as a follow-up to Operation Bark Alert to prosecute those that put the health of animals at risk and willfully violate the law. Missouri Attorney General Chris Koster joined in this charge and immediately put 173 kennel owners on notice to meet the standards required by law or discontinue doing business.

More Rescues, More Prosecutions, Enforcement Works

In 2009 alone, more than 3,000 dogs were rescued in 32 counties across Missouri. With increased prosecution, 164 fewer breeders were operating in Missouri in one year's time.

In 59 cases, animals were seized, sold and surrendered from substandard kennels in 2009 with 22 cases brought to resolution through stipulated settlement agreements. Moreover, six warrants were issued to substandard breeding kennel owners by various county officials.

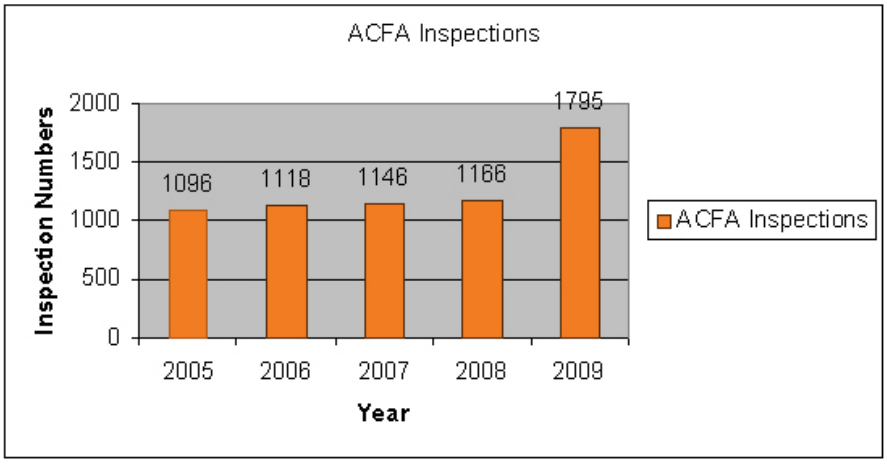
The Missouri Department of Agriculture received more than 200 Bark Alert tips through our online reporting system and phone calls to the Animal Care Facilities Act program. The increased focus on enforcement has paid off for Missouri. Focusing on unlicensed breeders has made a difference.

"Unlicensed breeders put our licensed breeding professionals at a competitive disadvantage and the health and welfare of the animals at risk." - Dr. Jon Hagler

Inspections

By adding two additional animal care inspectors and by shifting priorities and resources, Missouri conducted 629 more inspections in 2009.

In 2009 more than 1,781 violations were cited.



Sample of Cases in 2009

Greene County—The Department of Agriculture worked with the Greene County Sheriff's Department to obtain a warrant that led to the rescue of 92 Yorkshire Terriers from an unlicensed breeder near Springfield, Mo. The dogs were sent to various rescues and shelters in Missouri and eventually gained notoriety when some were featured on the Oprah Winfrey Show.

Ozark County— With assistance from the Ozark County Sheriff's Department, the Department of Agriculture visited a kennel in Ozark County with a history of violating the law. Although the owner of the property set several structures on fire, including the house and kennel, more than 200 dogs were rescued and sent to animal rescues across the nation.

Daviess County— In March 2009, the Daviess County Sheriff's Department contacted the Missouri Department of Agriculture about an at-large chimpanzee. A follow-up investigation found five monkeys and 117 dogs living in the home and yard. The dogs were sent to a humane shelter in Missouri while the U.S. Department of Agriculture licensed sanctuary took possession of the primates.

Media

Associated Press ~ Brownfield Network ~ NBC St. Louis ~ CBS St. Louis ~ Columbia Missourian ~ FOX Kansas City ~ NBC Kansas City ~ FOX News (national) ~ Joplin Globe ~ Kansas City Star ~ St. Louis Post-Dispatch ~ Springfield New-Leader~ National Public Radio ~ KMOX ~ KBIA ~ KOLR ~ KMIZ ~ KOMU ~ KRES ~ KSPR ~ KTTS ~ KY3 ~ KTTN ~ KFEQ ~ WTAD ~ Reuters ~ Missourinet

In its first year, Operation Bark Alert identified more than 200 unlicensed kennels, rescued more than 3,000 dogs and saw 164 fewer breeders in Missouri.

“Missouri had led the nation in licensing professional breeders and now we are leading the nation in cracking down on unlicensed breeders.”

Director of Agriculture Dr. Jon Hagler

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